Integrating management and marketing strategies at heritage sites

Abstract

Purpose - This paper examines the integration of management and marketing practices at heritage sites in Ireland.

Design/methodology/approach - The research process involved: phase one, a survey of 224 heritage attractions in Ireland and phase two, semi-structured interviews with the six organizations that represent the heritage sector on the island of Ireland.

Findings - The findings suggest that market research and marketing communication are vital in achieving a balance between targeting cultural tourists and tourists with no specific interest in heritage.

Research limitations/implications – The study has the restriction of being limited to the Irish case. However, these findings provide scope for further investigation, namely extending to other destinations and to sites which use different techniques.

Originality/value - A combined commitment to visitor research by the individual heritage sites could provide information to the representative organizations to facilitate target marketing and improved on-site management. However, a change of mindset is required among heritage practitioners in Ireland regarding the use of marketing and the implications for on-site management. The authors propose that this is achievable through education linked to the study of models of best practice.

Keywords – Heritage, Culture, Marketing, Management, Demarketing, Ireland

Paper type – Research paper

Introduction

This study explores the potential role of marketing in creating a balance between visitor impacts and the preservation of heritage resources. The research seeks to determine the effect that tourism has on the preservation of heritage sites in Ireland. The study involves two phases: firstly, the study examines relationship between marketing and visitor management. Secondly, the study explores perceived effect of modifications, visitor routing and staged heritage events. Cultural resource management (CRM) involves the management, protection and preservation of cultural resources, such as archaeological sites or artifacts, for future generations. By attracting fee paying visitors, many of these sites and artifacts make an economic contribution to the tourism industry. According to Fáilte Ireland (2006) when people think about Irish cultural resources they think of the main attractions such as Blarney Castle and Brú na Bóinne, but other attractions are not marketed to the same extent. Why? Misiura (2006) cites Drummond and Yeoman (2001) advising that successful heritage tourism threatens the assets on which the industry is based. Therefore, this issue is one for the management of more vulnerable and popular cultural resources to find a balance between access and preservation.

Managing Heritage Sites

Tourism is one of Ireland's largest service sectors. In revenue terms, the sector generates €6.5 billion for the economy in 2007 (Irish Tourism Industry Confederation, 2008). Experiencing the heritage of Ireland is a motivation for the majority of tourists, with eighty percent rating heritage as an important factor in their decision to visit. On average, tourists will visit more than four heritage sites while on holiday in Ireland (Fáilte Ireland, 2006). According to Fáilte Ireland (2006) cultural tourism is the point at which culture meets tourism, a leisure activity for people who wish to become immersed in a particular society. Chhabra *et al.* (2003) state that on the

demand side, heritage tourism is representative of the desire of visitors to experience and consume culture and in terms of supply, are widely seen by governments and private businesses as an economic tool. The research concludes that people are nostalgic about old ways of life and want to re-live them, at least temporarily. The main issues for heritage attractions are satisfying the expectations of visitors and managing their impacts, without compromising the authenticity of the visitor experience (Fyall and Garrod, 1998).

Misiura (2006) cites Ashworth and Howard (1999) in proposing that heritage is a process by which things come into the self-conscious arena when someone wants to preserve or collect them. Cultural resources potentially have economic value, in that by attracting fee paying visitors, they contribute to the tourism industry. Fáilte Ireland state in *Tourism Product Development Strategy 2007-2013* that Ireland's cultural heritage is a strong magnet for tourists. Along with scenic landscapes, coastlines, rivers and lakes, cultural heritage is the bedrock upon which Irish tourism has been built (Fáilte Ireland, 2006). Acknowledging the vulnerability of non-renewable resources, Fáilte Ireland's *Environmental Action Plan 2007-2009* notes that Ireland's tourism industry can only be sustained if the quality of its resources is maintained.

According to McKercher *et al.* (2004) popularity is not necessarily an indicator of successful heritage tourism because popularity can result in undesirable social, experiential and physical degradation impacts. The relationship between the interests of tourists and their bond with specific places is an emerging area within research (see, for example, Gross *et al.* 2007). Misiura (2006) explains that the essence of heritage marketing follows that of marketing in a business setting; that is the process involves finding out and delivering what the tourist wants, subject to the necessity of site protection. Therefore, marketing activities should encourage demand and satisfy the visitor but not to the detriment of what has to be preserved for future generations. For

example, the Skellig Michael World Heritage *Site Management Plan 2008 – 2018* proposes to manage visitor numbers by establishing a defined annual season for visitors and enhancing the visitor experience by maintaining a quality guide service.

According to Beeton (2003) in the attempt to increase revenue, marketing typically increases visitor numbers, which is the most common measure of tourism success and that this short-term focus has an adverse effect on sustainability. The Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC) (2001) identifies the conflict of interests in managing and marketing natural heritage, with particular reference to parks:

> The sheer volume of people using parks impacts on them, but numbers are necessary to generate income. (CTC, 2001, p. 81)

Richards and Wilson (2006) who cite Russo (2002) outline, what the author terms, a vicious circle of heritage tourism development in historic cities such as in Venice, Italy where increasing visitor numbers results in a devaluation of the tourist experience. The author claims that this causes the up-market cultural tourist to be replaced by day visitors who leave less money and more mess. However, the European Travel Commission (ETC) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) (2005) note that too little tourism can also have a negative effect on cultural resources:

> Abandoned to negligence and decay, lack of public interest and insufficient financial resources for its proper maintenance can be the consequence of too little tourism. (ETC and WTO, 2005, p. 40)

Goeldner, *et al.* (2000) proposes that the two primary considerations for a heritage site are competitiveness and sustainability and that these should be mutually supportive. However,

Beeton (2003) reports the variables exist usually after demand has been created through effective marketing that sustainability issues and visitor management are considered.

Marketing Heritage Sites

Misiura (2006) explains that the marketing of heritage coincides with the birth of marketing as an academic discipline in the 1950s. Kotler and Armstrong (2007) state that understanding, creating, communicating and delivering value and satisfaction are at the core of modern marketing. According to McManus (1997) many cultural resources are transformed into experiences to be marketed, sold and bought. Therefore, the basic marketing activities of advertising, packaging and target marketing play a central role. Middleton (1989) identifies seven components of a visit which can be influenced by marketing: the appearance of the entrance, the ambience in reception areas, the orientation at the start of a visit, visitor routing within an attraction, the quality of interpretation and displays, the attitudes and welcome of staff and the overall feeling of satisfaction and value. Furthermore, Ryan and Cave (2005) highlight the importance of developing an appropriate image for a region or specific tourist attraction.

According to Guerin (2000), conflict between the needs of cultural activities and marketing practices which results in skepticism among heritage practitioners regarding the usefulness of marketing. Guerin (2000) suggests that what is required is a measured understanding of marketing rather than forcing a commercially oriented model into heritage tourism. The straightforward approach to marketing which McManus (1997) suggests contrasts with Beeton and Benfield (2002) who believe that marketing, management and tourism development are interwoven at all stages. They argue that the approach is not simply a task of researching customers, producing and selling what they want.

Groffe (1998) and Beeton (2003) propose that marketing and visitor management be integrated through demarketing, an aspect of marketing that deals with discouraging consumers or a certain class of consumers either temporarily or permanently. The difference between demarketing and visitor management is not in the activity itself, but the stage at which one is applied. Visitors tend to access marketing material at the decision stage of their trip whereas visitor management occurs when people are actually at the site (Beeton, 2003). According to Apostolakis (2003) marketing in a heritage context is directed at repackaging the initial product to make the product more appealing and accessible to the mass market. Craik (1997) argues that the heritage product must be shaped for tourists or vice versa.

The act (*art*) of making heritage sites understandable and meaningful to visitors is known as heritage interpretation and is a central component of modern heritage tourism (Prentice *et al.*, 1998). Visitors learn more by using interactive exhibitions than traditional static exhibitions. In addition, they are attracted to interactive exhibitions and generally prefer them to traditional ones (Moscardo, 1996). According to Harrison (2000) interpretation involves presenting information in a form that is accessible to visitors. Prentice *et al.* (1998) study the effects of tour guides on learning, concluding that the experience of the tour has a significant emotional impact on visitors.

Moscardo (1996) expresses the importance of interpretation as a visitor management tool for relieving pressure on a heritage site. He explains that crowding and inappropriate behavior, such as touching delicate surfaces, littering and vandalism, can be minimized by effective interpretation that educates visitors and generates support for conservation by providing a positive visitor experience. Successful heritage attractions must effectively tell a story, make the experience participatory and relevant to the tourist, whilst providing a sense of authenticity (McKercher and du Cros, 2002). MacCannell (1979) introduces the concept of staged

authenticity, whereby hosts put culture on sale to create an appealing package. However, when packaging alters the nature of the product, the authenticity sought by visitors becomes staged.

Poria *et al.* (2003) advise that heritage sites have two distinct markets: firstly, consumers who visit heritage sites for educational enjoyment and secondly, consumers who come to be emotionally involved in an experience. According to Poria *et al*. (2003) the fact that tourists visit historic attractions for different reasons should be reflected in the marketing strategy of a heritage site. Psychographic segmentation based on perception of the site is required, which in turn, has implications for promotional efforts. The successful identification of these differences can result in changes to the marketing process, the pricing system, and the interpretation provided (Poria, 2001). Greffe (2004) explains that by classifying visitors into categories, suitable marketing and pricing policies can be selected. Greffe proposes five segments; educated middle-income or affluent consumers, families with children, slightly older people with more money and free time, socially underprivileged and marginalized groups and potential associates, who, after several visits can decide to involve themselves in supporting artistic activities through donations and lobbying activities. Each segment seeks different information and experiences. Poria *et al.* (2006) explain that because the same historic artifact or site is perceived differently by different segments, understanding behavior requires identifying the link(s) between the person and the place.

Integrating management and marketing

Beeton and Benfield (2002) claim that while the tourism industry is keen to maximize visitation and revenue through marketing and promotion, less attention has been paid to accommodating or reducing high levels of demand, especially at the planning and marketing stages. Liu (2003) explains that effective marketing can channel tourist demand to places that are

more impact-resilient. The ETC and WTO (2005) note that the timing of the decision to visit a cultural attraction is of great importance for marketing purposes. The majority of cultural visitors decide to visit before leaving home, which brings about the opportunity to market in source regions or countries. As the majority of marketing material are consulted before arriving at an attraction, this opportunity informs potential visitors of desirable behavior or restrictions at a site before they arrive, thus reducing the visitor management required. Wicks *et al.* (2004) agree that attracting more visitors may not always be the best strategy. Therefore, visitor numbers should not be the measure of success. Accordingly, the target audience should be visitors that spend the most money, have a quality learning experience, respect the local population and have the least impact on resources.

Wicks *et al.* (2004) recommend demarketing, a term first proposed by Kotler and Levy (1971). According to Beeton and Benfield (2002) up until the 1970s marketing dealt with a limitless supply of a product. In a reversal of this paradigm, periods in the marketplace of product shortages or scarcity to which marketers respond are apparent (Kotler and Levy 1971). The response is termed demarketing and is defined as an aspect of marketing that deals with discouraging customers or a certain class of customers on a temporary or permanent basis. Beeton and Benfield (2002) explain that the definition is not the opposite of marketing, but a fundamental aspect within marketing. Kotler and Levy (1971) describe three different types of demarketing:

1. General demarketing: when an organization wishes to reduce the level of total demand;
2. Selective demarketing: where demand from certain market segments is discouraged; and

3. Ostensible demarketing: in which marketing gives the appearance of wishing a reduction in demand as a result of scarcity, which in turn stimulates greater demand for the desired and increasingly scarce product.

The relevant literature in the 1980s includes discussions of demarketing with regard to tourism. Clements (1989) states that while the market for tourists may or may not be suitable for segmentation, it is clear that market sub-groups are not equally profitable. This is when a demarketing policy should have an active role in the management process. Beeton (2003) advises that consciously increasing demand, revenue and visitor numbers through marketing may result in the loss of the tourism industry's natural market. Instead, by including demarketing in the marketing mix, a destination may attract environmentally aware visitors and select specific markets, thereby enforcing two of the three types of demarketing Kotler and Levy (1971) suggest.

Groff (1998) identifies three circumstances where demarketing strategies are used. The first is where temporary shortages of the product exist, either due to lack of supply or underestimation of demand. The second is when a resource's popularity is threatening the quality of the visitor experience. Thirdly, demarketing may be utilized when conflict arises between the demands of visitors and the need for safety.

According to Jamrozy (2007) tourism management uses the concept of sustainability but marketing still uses the classic economic paradigm, that is, profit is the goal. Jamrozy advises that a sustainable marketing philosophy needs to incorporate societal, consumer and environmental perspectives. The model represents four dimensions; sustainability, economic viability, social equity and environmental protection. A focus on just one dimension, such as marketing under the economic paradigm, is insufficient, whereas a sustainable marketing approach integrates the four dimensions, but not necessarily in equal measures.

Referring to British heritage attractions, Middleton (1989) suggests that a greater professionalism in marketing is required, and that a commitment to market research is essential to monitor changes in visitor behavior and expectations, leading to updates and enhancements of the product. Middleton (1989) identifies a range of issues which remain relevant today. The ETC and WTO (2005) recommend that visitor management should be an integral part of the policy for various issues at sites such as traffic control, parking, signage and marketing. When the flow of tourists is already greater and at times out of balance, stronger measures need to be taken, such as increasing the costs of the visit, restricting traffic, pre-booking, encouraging visitors to visit alternative attractions in the area or stimulating visitors to come in low season periods. Furthermore, heritages sites could think about the kind of tourists they want to attract. For example, day-trippers with a relatively low spend per visit, overnight visitors with a relatively high spend and individual or group tourists. Heritage sites need to develop a clear strategy regarding how they can utilize tourism revenues to develop their site.

Beeton (2003) suggests five demarketing tools that can be incorporated into the marketing of attractions in combination with visitor management. The tools are:

- Educating potential visitors with marketing and promotional literature;
- Encouraging specific desirable markets while discouraging undesirable ones;
- Publicizing alternative sites;
- Limiting permitted activities either seasonally or entirely; and
- Making access to fragile areas more difficult while simultaneously promoting less fragile areas.

Moscardo (1996) claims that if the interpretation at built heritage sites is effective and creates what the author terms mindful visitors, then the management and sustainability of the sites is improved. According to NWHO (1999) careful design of interpretative programs influences the distribution of visitors at a site. Mindful visitors, in turn, have a greater appreciation and understating of a site, know the consequences of their actions and how to act in ways that lessen negative impacts. Wearing *et al.* (2007) advise that conservation messages should guide marketing strategies of heritage sites and that marketing activities should identify only markets that are appropriate.

Method

Data are collected in two phases: firstly, a questionnaire is circulated to examine the practices of the 224 registered heritage sites in Ireland. Of the 224 questionnaires, 100 valid responses are received; a response rate of 45 percent. A mix of multiple choice questions, rank-order rating scales and dichotomous questions are used. Where dichotomous questions are used, respondents are asked to explain their answer. The areas of site preservation, demarketing, authenticity and visitor impact are explored using open ended questions. As appropriate, narrative structuring is used to analyse the qualitative answers from the questionnaire.The questionnaire examines ten key issues: the role of marketing; visitor management; information management; visitor education; market research; market segmentation; pricing strategies; promotional tools; demarketing; site modification and preservation strategies. Secondly, depth interviews are conducted to explore the key issues arising from the questionnaire. The interviews are conducted with the six organizations which represent the heritage sector in Ireland. The organizations are: the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, National Trust, Houses Castles and Gardens of Ireland,

Fáilte Ireland, Heritage Ireland and Office of Public Works (Visitor Services). The interviews explore the following topics: marketing strategies, pricing, on-site management and the impact(s) of visitors. The interviews are taped, transcribed, and superfluous material removed such as digressions and repetitions to assist the analysis. Narrative structuring (Kvale, 1996) is used to create a coherent story of the interviewee's experience(s) of integrating management and marketing strategies for heritage resources.

Research findings

Respondents are asked if they consider tourism to have a positive or negative effect on the preservation of heritage attractions. The majority (70 percent) believe tourism has a positive effect and 24 percent are of the opinion of no effect at all. A small minority (six percent) consider tourism to have a negative effect on the preservation of heritage attractions. The following quote encapsulates many of the points made:

> Managed tourism allows for the visitor centre to be developed and maintained and significant visitor volumes restricted to only areas where visitor management is in place. The tourism dividend finances preservation and education measures. (Respondent 4)

Furthermore, two thirds of respondents believe no conflict between preserving heritage attractions and increasing the number of visitors. However:

> Access and preservation is a balancing issue. Buildings and collections experience wear and tear but it is important that they are seen and used. (Respondent 17)

The interviews indicate the representative organizations share the view of the individual heritage sites; believing that visitors make a positive contribution to the preservation of heritage attractions and not just in terms of revenue generation. One interviewee explains that:

> In both cases [entrance fee or not] visitors help keep information in circulation and pass on knowledge that would otherwise get lost quite quickly...without getting the flow of visitors a lot of sites wouldn't be able to stay open and would get worn down. (Representative body B)

Visits to sites with no entrance fee generate positive feedback, which increases the knowledge and importance of the sites. Revenue at sites with entrance fees contributes to general maintenance costs.

State owned heritage attractions use a variety of visitor management tools. The majority of charity/trust owned heritage attractions have traffic and parking restrictions and most privately owned attractions use variations in admission fees as a visitor management tool. During peak periods pre-booking requirements are enforced by the majority of respondents. According to Beeton and Benfield (2002) marketing does not always deal with an unlimited supply of product. In cases of product shortages or scarcity, such as limited capacity, marketers must respond accordingly. The data collected by the questionnaire indicates that marketing activities are impeded by capacity restrictions for 22 percent of the heritage sites. The findings indicate that apart from the respondents who suggest no capacity or visitor volume issues exist, the most common response is that management activity, rather than marketing, is important for reducing the negative impacts of visitors. Educating visitors and influencing routing throughout the attractions is ranked second, suggesting that when capacity constraints exist, the heritage sites use on-site visitor management before they use marketing initiatives. The survey results also

indicate variations in how marketing is carried out at heritage attractions. The majority of respondents from state owned heritage attractions indicate that marketing is carried out by a representative organization and not by the individual sites. For the majority of respondents from charity/trust owned heritage attractions state marketing is guided by a marketing plan. Privately owned heritage attractions mainly conduct marketing on an unplanned basis when deemed necessary.

Based on the visitor classifications of Greffe (2004) tour groups are the visitor type deemed most preferable by respondents. However, 25 percent of respondents choose none of the options and emphasize that they do not have a preferred visitor type. Furthermore, the majority of respondents from all ownership categories state that no customers are considered undesirable or unprofitable. However, some of these respondents note unsupervised children, teenagers and language students as potentially problematic.

The most popular promotional tools used by the heritage sites are web presence, brochures, signage and print media advertising. Television is the least utilized promotional tool. The main purpose of web presence is to inform visitors of what is available at the attraction. Web presence is under-utilized as a visitor management tool, with only one fifth of respondents using the service for pre-bookings and educating visitors about desirable behavior at the site. In addition, respondents report using web presence to obtain visitor feedback and to provide basic information such as opening times, upcoming events and directions.

The admission price at heritage attractions is usually set by the appropriate representative organization. The majority of respondents indicate that admission fees are set at the current rate(s) to cover running and maintenance costs and attract more visitors. This is not aligned with Greffe (2004) who explains that entry price is usually set by dividing costs by the number of

visitors expected. Making a profit to reinvest in the attraction or for commercial purposes is not deemed to be priority. Fyall and Garrod (1998) recommend that if a site gets damaged by tourism, those responsible for the damage should pay for the prevention or repair. However, the income from admission fees does not result in surplus revenue after running and maintenance costs are covered. Therefore, the funding required for the long-term sustainability of the site is generated by other means.

Apostolakis (2003) explains that marketing in a heritage context involves repackaging the resources to make them more appealing and accessible to the mass market. In this research 75 percent of respondents provide details of modifications to the original heritage resource. These include: disabled access, cafes and restaurants, exhibitions and displays, barriers to protect both displays and visitors, live performances and interpretative centers. According to MacCannell (1979) when packaging alters the nature of the resource, the authenticity is affected. However, the majority of respondents believe that the modifications have a positive effect on authenticity. Making heritage sites understandable and meaningful to visitors is termed heritage interpretation (Prentice *et al.,* 1998). Literature is the most common form of interpretation of the heritage sites, followed closely by signage and tour guides. Prentice *et al.* (1998) suggest that tour guides have an emotional impact on visitors and in this research their importance is clearly evident with over 80 percent of respondents employing guides.

The literature recommends the inclusion of demarketing in the marketing mix to attract environmentally conscious visitors (Beeton, 2003). Only four percent of respondents claim to use/have used demarketing on receiving the explanation. The examples given by respondents include withdrawing from brochures that list attractions suitable for children and turning visitors away when maximum capacity is reached. In addition respondents also restrict activities at the

sites, discourage access to fragile areas and promote less fragile areas. Therefore, demarketing is not supported while visitor management is enforced. The difference between the two is not so much in the activity itself but the stage at which one is applied (Beeton, 2003). Therefore, demarketing would facilitate a proactive approach, whereas the reality is that sites are reactive in imposing visitor management.

Conclusion

A need exists for demarketing and sustainable marketing in the heritage tourism industry. The authors recommend these two concepts be included in the wider marketing literature rather than mainly in models based on scenarios of unlimited supply. Subsequently, the incorporation of visitor management at the visitors' decision-making stage through marketing may reduce the level of visitor management required when they arrive at the site. The process requires site managers to develop an awareness of the benefits of sustainable marketing for preservation. In this process marketing is not seen as a means of generating visitor volumes for commercial purposes. The authors recommend that heritage sites should be guided in appropriate marketing and promotional strategies thus encouraging a move away from possibly less appropriate traditional commercial marketing. The development of market research programmes by the representative organizations and the enforcement of these on-site by individual attractions would give a direct insight into the expectations of visitors and their levels of satisfaction. This approach would use fewer resources than if the representative organizations carry out research independently. Real time information would enable sites to predict busy and quiet periods, enabling them to staff accordingly and reduce queues and congestion. The resulting quality of the visitor's experience justifies charging a price high enough to generate the revenue for marketing and sustainability. Finally, the authors recommend the involvement of stakeholders in

the development of interpretation practices. This ensures that the remit of the heritage practitioners, marketers and management are met while achieving a balance between communicating to the cultural tourist and the general tourist alike. Marketing is a vital component of the communication process and helps to make heritage accessible and meaningful to more than just the specialist cultural tourist. The main issues for heritage attractions are satisfying visitors' expectations and managing their impacts without compromising the authenticity of the site.

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